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FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1946

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0462

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000407

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CE, INL/C; JUSTICE FOR OP-DAT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: HARABIN RECALL DEBATE MARKS NEW LOW IN SLOVAK POLITICS

REF: BRATISLAVA 334

Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶11. (C) Summary. During a futile attempt by the opposition to recall Justice Minister Stefan Harabin, members of the ruling coalition engaged in some of the basest ad hominem attacks, including blatant anti-Semitic rhetoric, that we can recall. The crux of the opposition's charge, led by former Justice Ministers Daniel Lipsic (KDH) and Lucia Zitnanska (SDKU), is that Harabin lied about his ties to the reputed head of an Albanian heroin smuggling ring, Baki Sadiki (reftel).

Harabin, PM Fico, and other coalition members have cast the episode as another attention-seeking ploy by the opposition to discredit a member of the government. The September 4 debate was vituperative and shallow, featuring anti-Semitic remarks by both Harabin and Meciar, e.g., Harabin at one point compared Lipsic to Goebbels. During the session, only KDH directly responded to the anti-Semitic slurs.

Subsequently, leading coalition members told the daily SME that they had not noticed the anti-Semitic tone of the comments, and SDKU Chair Mikulas Dzurinda said that his party had tried to keep the focus on the basic issues at hand. On September 5, PM Fico merely distanced himself from both Harabin and Lipsic's rhetoric, without addressing the question of anti-Semitism. On September 6 he declared himself "against any expressions of anti-Semitism," but also made clear that he was neither apologizing for or condemning Harabin. Fico repeated his condemnation of anti-Semitism at a September 9 Holocaust memorial event. Harabin on September 7 "condemned every expression of anti-Semitism...If my expression affected anyone, I deeply apologize." Meciar offered no apologies. Comment: Harabin's job security hinges on PM Fico's assessment of the political winds; if the fallout continues, he may conclude that firing Harabin (even at the cost of infuriating Meciar) benefits him. End Summary.

The Session: Goebbels, "Lipstein," and Threats

¶12. (C) After Lipsic laid out the opposition's charges against Harabin, Harabin and his supporters launched a raft of ad hominem, anti-Semitic and often off-point responses. Harabin referred to Lipsic as an exhibitionist (a charge repeated throughout the day), compared him to members of the Nazi party who were ashamed of and hid their Jewish roots, and even likened him to Goebbels. Prime Minister Fico, who attended the opening minutes of the session, noted that the National Security Office (NBU), which is led by an HZDS appointee, has confirmed that Harabin poses no security risk.

¶13. (C) At one point in the session, Harabin murmured to Lipsic, as they passed close to one another near the dais, "You are going to jail, you ----head." Later, Harabin denied that he had made the statement until a recording that captured the exchange was made public. Shortly thereafter, Meciar in one of several interventions, asked if Lipsic's forebears had been named "Lipstein." He said that a good friend who had been tortured in a communist prison camp by a "Mr. "Lipstein," who his friend swore was related to Lipsic. Meciar denied that his comments were anti-Semitic, claiming that he was merely trying to clarify Lipsic's familial identity. (Comment: Some members of Lipsic's mother's family were Jewish and perished in the Holocaust.) Harabin, by turns, also attacked Zitnanska and former FM Kukan for their alleged ties with questionable figures and criticized the beleaguered Special Prosecutor, Dusan Kovacic.

¶14. (C) Against the backdrop of these verbal fireworks, poloffs were struck by the relaxed and casual demeanor of most of the coalition MPs. As Ministers walked in and out of the session -- Kalinak, Baska, Madaric, Tomanova and Rasi could be seen -- they displayed little interest in the proceedings. Notable on the opposition side: Mikulas Dzurinda did not speak at the opening of the session. This could have been a tactical move, given Dzurinda's unpopularity, but SDKU's quiescence sent the message that the issues at stake were not of great import. Meciar, in addition to smearing against Lipsic's deceased relatives, said he would put forward a resolution calling on law enforcement officials to investigate whether MPs who presented the evidence against Harabin violated had any laws.

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(Comment: Smer later blocked the resolution, provoking Meciar's ire.)

The Outcome

¶15. (C) As predicted, the vote to recall Harabin failed along straight opposition-coalition lines. Per reftel, it is widely believed that Harabin's relationship with Meciar is so strong that he will be hard to dismiss. In any case, knowledgeable contacts continue to suggest that Harabin will maneuver to obtain the top spot in the Supreme Court by year's end. Comment: The rhetorical content of the recall session -- and the ex-post facto comments by key politicians -- were extremely disturbing. So few politicians condemned the blatantly anti-Semitic speech; most significantly, it took Prime Minister Fico three days to denounce the anti-Semitic nature of comments, and even his strongest statements still seek to explain the rhetoric. During a September 9 event with the Israeli Ambassador to Slovakia, Fico said that the comments were clearly the "result of personal animosity," because anyone with such opinions wouldn't be in the government or coalition partners with Smer. Surveying the press and public gathered in the gallery to watch the session, poloffs were struck by the fact that no one seemed particularly surprised or disturbed by the proceedings. While there was always going to be an element of political theater about the event, given the obvious outcome, the opposition's charges against Harabin -- and the nasty responses -- were troubling.

¶16. (C) Comment cont: As with many other decisions made by the governing coalition, the most salient factor in the decision to defend and keep Harabin appears to be related to the preservation of the coalition and providing benefits/protections to its members and their friends. More than any other personnel choice that PM Fico has made -- apart from choosing to govern with Vladimir Meciar and Jan Slota in the first place -- his decision to defend and keep Harabin in office reflects a troubling contempt for the rule of law and meaningful efforts to fight corruption, not to mention for civilized political discourse. We are certain that opposition attempts to depose Harabin are doomed to

failure. In fact, Lipsic told us on September 10 that President Gasparovic had asked Fico to fire Harabin, but Fico refused. It is possible, however, that Fico, ever-sensitive to public opinion, might yet decide that the cons of keeping Harabin outweigh the pros.

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